

Coffee Table Book Features “Great Road Style”

The Decorative Arts Legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee

Linked historically, culturally, and geographically, the counties that make up Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee are also connected by a shared decorative arts tradition.

“Great Road Style,” so called because of the region’s historical importance as a stage route connecting the eastern seaboard with the western frontier, is evidenced in distinctive forms of furniture, ceramics, textiles, and metalwork.

Until now, the area’s rugged geography — and the isolation of its communities — has prevented systematic documentation of its decorative

artifacts. In a new coffee table book, ***Great Road Style: The Decorative Arts Legacy of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee***, Abingdon’s own Betsy White takes readers on an engaging tour of the region’s striking material culture and, in doing so, fosters a new appreciation of its role in the development of American decorative arts.

Great Road Style is the first substantive effort to conduct primary research in a largely undocumented territory. The survey upon which the book is based involved thousands of hours’ worth of fieldwork conducted across two states in an attempt to offer the most detailed accounting possible of handmade objects produced along the Great Road before 1940.

The eventual product of that exhaustive research was an archive of photographs, slides, and data sheets on more than 2,000 objects representing diverse sectors of the survey area. In organizing and providing a narrative for this treasure trove of material, White and her research team have defined and delineated for the first time what constitutes “Great Road Style.”

The 256-page book is lavishly illustrated with compelling examples (195 images) and includes a listing of artisans who have been identified to date. *Great Road Style* will be a valuable resource for collectors, museum curators, antique dealers, or anyone interested in southern culture or the decorative arts.

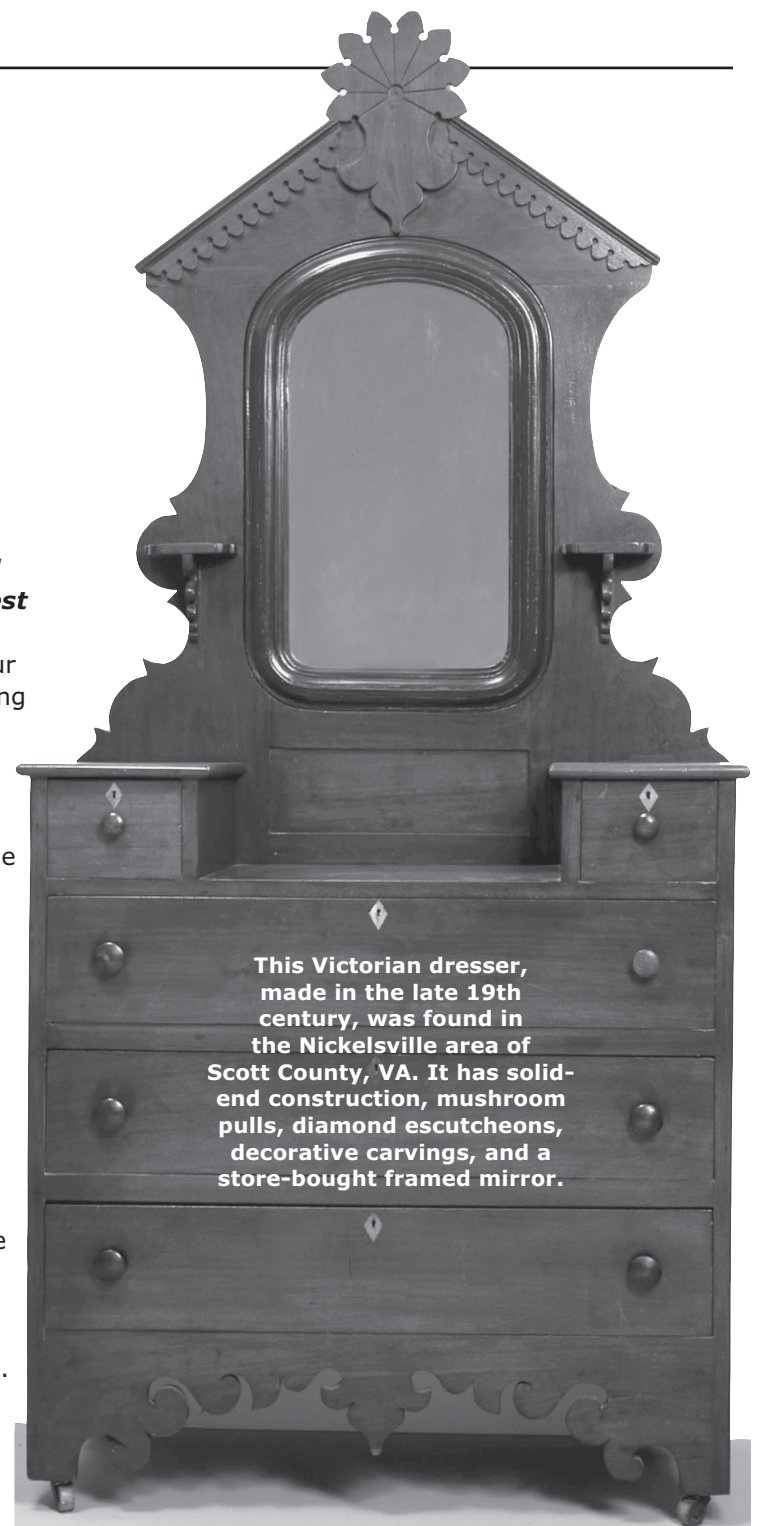
What is “Great Road Style”?

According to White, “The material culture that developed in places like Abingdon, VA and Jonesborough, TN was made by artisans who came from other places, such as Philadelphia, Baltimore, and other cities on the eastern seaboard. These craftsmen all converged here with learned styles and techniques; the new settlers were the same, coming here with preferences learned elsewhere.

“The few things that settlers brought with them would not be included in our survey. We concentrated on those that were actually made here contributing to the ‘new’ body of material culture specific to this area. Their own style evolved while here, learning from each other, taking cues from their market’s preferences, bringing along with them favorite techniques — all a blend of other regional styles. Thus, what happened here has traces of other places, all blended together to form a ‘look’ that speaks of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee. One

Have bag, will travel: Marcus King spent 18 months and 30,000 miles tracking down historic objects, documenting items with photos and data sheets.

Orders for *Great Road Style* will be taken at Mistletoe Market, Nov. 11-13, at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center, Abingdon, VA. Copies will begin shipping Nov. 21, with an official release date of January 2006.



This Victorian dresser, made in the late 19th century, was found in the Nickelsville area of Scott County, VA. It has solid-end construction, mushroom pulls, diamond escutcheons, decorative carvings, and a store-bought framed mirror.



Always interested in history and historical preservation as well as the arts, Betsy White says the Cultural Heritage Project, and the resulting book, is “the most interesting thing I’ve ever done.” She sees the data from the Project as providing an opportunity for a lifetime of research into unanswered questions.

